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A FEW REMARKS ON THE EMENDATION, "WHO SMOTHERS HER WITH PAINTING," IN THE PLAY OF *CYMBELINE.*

Discovered by *Mr. COLLIER,* in a Corrected Copy of the Second Edition of *Shakespeare.*

BY

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A FEW REMARKS, &c.

THERE are, perhaps, few subjects requiring greater caution in their consideration than conjectural criticisms on the texts of our early poets. The English language and its idioms have so imperceptibly altered during the last three centuries—that whilst the casual observer might imagine the language of Elizabeth's time was almost identical with that spoken at the present day—even the student of our literature, unless he has paid special attention to that particular section of English philology which may be termed, for want of a more expressive term, *the language of idiom*, will be inclined to measure the phraseology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the standard of that now in common use, and so be involved in errors which, arising from a defective *system*, will of course be almost innumerable.

The first collective edition of Shakespeare's works appeared in 1623, seven years after the poet's death, and many of the plays contained in that work were undoubtedly printed from very authentic manuscripts,

probably, in many cases, from the author's own autograph. This noble collection was republished in nine years, the second edition appearing in 1632, with many corrections of the press, but with other variations in idiomatic passages, which, *so far from being of any authority*, prove that the editor of the second folio, whoever he was, altered the original text without the slightest reference to proper authority, in many cases adapting the idiom to the changes which had been made in English phraseology during even that brief period. Subsequent editors made further alterations, of course unauthorised by the original manuscripts, which probably perished soon after the production of the printed edition of 1623.

The nearer, therefore, we approach the fountain-head, in respect of antiquity, the more likely will be the probability of obtaining correct emendations of Shakespeare's text. A person living in 1623, with the first folio, just published, before him, even presuming him to have been only conversant with the colloquial phraseology of the age, and not having had the opportunity of witnessing the plays in representation, would certainly be more capable of correcting any palpable errors, than one who followed at a long interval, although the latter may have had superior advantages in other respects. And so on. As far, indeed, as one can judge on a question, where the means of comparison must necessarily be defective from the deficiency of material, it must be admitted

that a corrector of Shakespeare's text in 1623 would be of more authority than one commencing in 1632, and that the latter would, in his turn, be of more authority than Rowe or Theobald. This must nevertheless be stated with some reservation, and with special reference to the progress of the changes in English idiom; for I believe it to admit of proof that the English language underwent greater changes between 1600 and 1630 in that respect than have since taken place, even were we to include the two centuries and upwards which have now elapsed. In fact, for the last century and a half, however particular words may have varied in the degree of favour bestowed upon them, and although many new ones have been created, it may fairly be questioned whether the idiom of the language has undergone any sensible variation, certainly no important change, during that period.

We are in this position respecting our critical knowledge of the writings of Shakespeare. During the poet's lifetime, a portion of his plays and poems appeared in print, some being authentic copies, others palpably unauthorised by the author, and certainly forming a very inefficient collection of the works of the "greatest name in all literature." This deficiency was supplied, in some respects in a very admirable manner, by the collective edition to which we have just referred; but, to whatever cause we may attribute it, there undoubtedly remain many errors of importance

which must be corrected before we can possess a text of Shakespeare in the state in which it left the hands of the writer, unblotted in a single line, as we are informed by Ben Jonson, in his truly noble testimony to the intellectual and moral worth of our great dramatist. From what sources and by what authority shall these errors be rejected, and their places supplied by the pure words of Shakespeare? Alas! we have not even the resources accessible to the editors of the ancient writers of Greece and Rome. With one exception, which is more curious than valuable in a literary point of view, we have no contemporary manuscripts, no copies of the early quartos corrected by the author, and no observations on difficult passages by early critics, who would have been likely, from their knowledge of the language and literature of the period, to have cleared up many difficulties, and enlightened many obscurities.

At a late period in Shakespearian criticism, after nearly all the harvest had been supposed to have been garnered, Mr. Collier, to whom all students of our early poetry are under lasting obligations, produces a volume which, without partaking exactly of the character whence we might more reasonably have anticipated, if at all, a solution of some of these difficulties, cannot but be regarded as a truly important addition to the sources of information already accessible. Mr. Collier has discovered a copy of the edition of 1632, filled with early MS. corrections of the text by a person evidently well

acquainted with the author he attempts to correct, and worthy of the greatest consideration. We may safely accept these corrections as nearly contemporary with the work itself, for the great changes in the English idiom having been made before the year 1632, it is of little consequence whether we adopt 1632 or 1640 as the date at which they were written.

Presuming, then, for the sake of argument, these corrections were made in 1632, only sixteen years after the death of Shakespeare, we have at last something tangible, some early authority to which to refer when a passage in the text is inexplicable. Let us not, however, be too precipitate. It is well known to every student that in philology, as in science, there are systematic boundaries which, when confirmed by evidence and observation, must not be violated without the strongest proof of the cases being exceptional. Once let us satisfactorily ascertain the existence of a law, and cases of opposition to that law will have to be most seriously considered, and not admitted as true exceptions on slight testimony. Applying this canon to the corrections of Mr. Collier's folio, there are two circumstances under which no manuscript emendation of so late a date as 1632 will be admissible.

1. It will not be admissible in any case where good sense can be satisfactorily made of the passage as it stands in the original, even although the correction may appear to give greater force or harmony to the passage.

2. It will not be admissible in any alteration of an idiomatic passage, where a similar turn of language can be produced in any contemporary writer; and it must be at once rejected, if the like idiom can be discovered in other parts of the works of Shakespeare himself.

With these reservations, it would be unjust not to acquiesce in the opinion of the value attached to Mr. Collier's volume; and no one can be more anxious than myself for the revelation of the many important suggestions it in all probability contains; but when we find Mr. Collier almost unhesitatingly adopting readings that merely have the merit of variation, and giving his immediate adhesion to others which admit of the greatest doubt, and deserve the profoundest investigation, a few observations, not implying in the remotest degree a depreciation of their value, but merely suggesting the application of a somewhat severer canon of judging of them before adoption, can scarcely, I hope, be considered either disrespectful to Mr. Collier, or presuming on the patience of the public. It is only a student who can really appreciate the labours of a student; and Mr. Collier's exertions in this department of literature have been so arduous, so meritorious, and what perhaps is still better, so successful, it is, I feel sure, quite unnecessary to disclaim any idea of controversy beyond the gentle one of suggesting what we imagine to be the path of Truth.

That the corrector of the folio of 1632 made his emendations conjecturally can scarcely admit of a doubt; the mere alteration of *guiled shore* in the Merchant of Venice, to *guiling shore*, distinctly proving he made his correction *after the grammatical construction which allowed the substitution of the passive participle for the active, had fallen into disuse.* It would be, however, obviously unfair to test the value of the volume by the very few selections Mr. Collier has made, because these appear to have been purposely taken somewhat indiscriminately, and in the slight glance I had of it, at a meeting of the Council of the Shakespeare Society, I observed more than one of very great value, which may assist in determining the conjectures of Gifford and others. At present, therefore, it is proposed to limit our consideration to one correction, which has already received almost universal assent, but which will not, I think, eventually be confirmed.

In the play of Cymbeline (Act iii, Sc. 4), Imogen, in the agony of her apprehensions respecting Posthumus, says,—

> . . . . . "Some jay of Italy,
> Whose mother was her painting, hath betray'd him;
> Poor I am stale, a garment out of fashion."

The MS. corrector of the second folio, not being acquainted with the figurative idiomatic phraseology

in the second line, which was current under various forms in the dramatic literature of Shakespeare's period, gives a reading which is unquestionably more suitable to modern hearers, and, under any circumstances, must be considered a verbal alteration of peculiar ingenuity,—

> . . . . . "Some jay of Italy,
> *Who smothers her with painting*, hath betray'd him."

It is unnecessary to observe that she refers to an Italian courtesan, and that the first five words of the second line, whichever reading we adopt, clearly mean that she was the creature of Painting not of Nature. I am prepared to show that the *original* reading expresses this in grammatical and forcible phraseology, *and that it is confirmed by other passages in the works of Shakespeare himself.*

One little word has created any obscurity that might have arisen. Had the phrase run, "whose mother was painting," there would scarcely have been any commentary expected or given. The adjunct of *her*, although in strict unison with the style of Shakespeare, sounds at first somewhat harsh, but the meaning of the passage, in the absence of any doubt suggested by the commentators, would have been readily interpreted, "Some jay (or courtesan) of Italy, the creature of painting, hath betray'd him." Not only is this kind of imagery usual, but we actually

find it introduced into the very next act of this same play,—

> " *Clo.* Thou villain base,
> Know'st me not by my clothes?
> *Gui.* No, nor thy tailor, rascal,
> Who is thy grandfather; he made those clothes,
> *Which, as it seems, make thee.*"
>
> *Cymbeline*, Act iv, Sc. 2.

Here is precisely the same thought, and might be expressed in the same terms, " whose father was his clothing." A much stronger instance will be found in All's Well that Ends Well, act i, sc. 2,—

> " Let me not live, quoth he,
> After my flame lacks oil, to be the snuff
> Of younger spirits, whose apprehensive senses
> All but new things disdain; whose judgments are
> *Mere fathers of their garments;* whose constancies
> Expire before their fashions."

Mr. Collier has a sensible remark on this passage. " Tyrwhitt," he says, " would read *feathers* for *fathers;* but the sense of the old reading is very obvious; the judgments of such persons are only employed in begetting new modes of dressing their persons." Precisely so; and a similar explanation will suit the passage in Cymbeline. If *whose mother was her painting* was, as I have heard it said, too obscure a phrase to be used before the " groundlings " of the Globe, surely *mere fathers of their garments* is open

to the same objection.* Singularly enough, the elder critics proposed *feather* in the place of *mother*, as Tyrwhitt suggested it in the other play for *father*. I am persuaded no alteration is tenable in either instance.

It must be recollected the metaphorical use of *father*, *mother*, and *parent*, is of very frequent occurrence in the old dramatists. Thus, in Shakespeare, we have the following instances besides those already quoted,—

> "Thou still hast been the father of good news."
>
> *Hamlet*, Act ii, Sc. 2.
>
> "What news, lord Bardolph? every minute now
> Should be the father of some stratagem."
>
> 2 *Henry IV*, Act i, Sc. 1.

The use of the word here only bears a distant analogy to that in the passage in Cymbeline, but combined with the circumstance that Shakespeare elsewhere represents the dress as a man's father, can we refuse to accept the probability of his regarding the courtesan's painting as her mother,—the courtesan, in fact, created by painting? The imagery is surely not more forced with painting than with clothing. If a man's dress can be metaphorically called his father, a courtesan's painting can, with equal pro-

* Steevens quotes the following important parallel passage from an old play, "a parcel of conceited feather-caps, *whose fathers were their garments*." I should feel much obliged by a reference to the play from which it was taken, Steevens having mislaid his note of the particular drama.

priety, be called her mother; and it must also be noticed that Imogen continues the imagery in the next line, calling herself, "a garment out of fashion." If the passages directly bearing on this subject be placed in juxtaposition, the reader will, perhaps, more distinctly perceive the great force of the line of argument we have pursued,—

. . . . . "Some jay of Italy,
WHOSE MOTHER WAS HER PAINTING, hath betray'd him;
Poor I am stale, a garment out of fashion."

Cymbeline, Act iii, Sc. 4.

"*Clo.* Thou villain base,
Know'st me not by my clothes?
Gui. No, nor thy tailor, rascal,
Who is thy grandfather; HE MADE THOSE CLOTHES,
WHICH, AS IT SEEMS, MAKE THEE."

Cymbeline, Act iv, Sc. 2.

(Compare King Lear, Act ii, Sc. 2.)

"Let me not live, quoth he,
After my flame lacks oil, to be the snuff
Of younger spirits, whose apprehensive senses
All but new things disdain; WHOSE JUDGMENTS ARE
MERE FATHERS OF THEIR GARMENTS; whose constancies
Expire before their fashions."

All's Well that Ends Well, Act i, Sc. 2.

"A parcel of conceited feather-caps, WHOSE FATHERS WERE THEIR GARMENTS."—*Old Play, cited, without reference, by Steevens.*

There can be little doubt but that a careful examination of our old plays would enable us to quote other

passages of similar import, but what is here produced will, it is thought, be sufficient to prove that *it was not unusual to refer to the external adornment of the person figuratively as the parent, especially in cases where that adornment was a prominent feature.* This admitted, it must unquestionably be unsafe to receive the correctness of any emendation of the first passage quoted from Cymbeline, unless it were clearly supported by good and contemporary authority, such as an early quarto, or a MS. correction, the source of which could be clearly traced to Shakespeare's time. Mr. Collier asserts the emendation of his folio must "*instantly* carry acquiescence with it." No conjectural alterations can be so received. The more plausible they are, the greater is the necessity of examining them more earnestly, so that our judgment be not diverted from what is, in all cases of Shakespearian criticism, the absolute necessity of ascertaining whether or no we are departing from the phraseology of the poet and his contemporaries. No sophistry can long conceal the importance of an attention to this, before giving our adhesion to violent changes, even in a case, as in the present one, where the alteration is so exceedingly clever, that, had it occurred to a modern critic, he would undoubtedly have enjoyed the conventional title of 'ingenious' ever afterwards. In the words of Johnson, applied to another critical effort, it might have been styled a noble emendation, placing "the critic on a level with the author." But inquirers

in this branch of literature must have observed how fallacious are all conjectural readings; how the discovery of a really ancient text of authority will dissipate pages of critical ingenuity and learning; and although a hint at the possibility of "Smothers her with painting," being capable of question, has at present been impatiently listened to, we may still venture to hope that what has been here advanced will cause a little examination to be given to the subject, before it be decided that the old reading shall be displaced by the new.

Avenue Lodge, Brixton Hill;
March, 1852.

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